

9 WILWYNE
CLOSE
CAVERSHAM

PRELIMINARY
ECOLOGICAL
APPRAISAL



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. In September 2019, ACD Environmental Ltd carried out an Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of a parcel of land at 9 Wilwyne Close, Caversham, hereafter referred to as the 'Application Site'.
- 1.2. The Application Site comprises part of the garden of an existing detached dwelling at 9 Wilwyne Close. The Application Site will be subject to a planning application for the construction of a new residential unit and associated access driveway link onto Wilwyne Close.
- 1.3. The habitats within the Application Site comprise amenity grassland, trees, shrubs and bare ground. The habitats within the footprint of the proposed development are of negligible ecological value, other than a mature walnut which contains a woodpecker/squirrel hole which is a potential bat roosting/bird nesting feature. The proposed dwelling would result in the loss of the walnut and a group of Lawson Cypress. A large mature oak tree (with a potential bat roosting feature) is also present in the garden, which would be retained and protected during construction.
- 1.4. The walnut and oak were inspected with an endoscope by a qualified tree climber with a bat licence on 23rd April 2020. A cavity was discovered on a north-east facing branch, which was spire-shaped, 5cm in diameter and extended approximately 15cm deep into the branch, with surrounding callus roll. The hole was wet with resident slugs, and there was no evidence of bat activity. However, given the suitability of the feature for bats, prior to felling of the walnut tree, we advocate a pre-felling tree climbing inspection by a licenced climber/bat licence holder, to confirm that no bats are present. Should bats be found, follow-up surveys and/or a licence from Natural England would be required to lawfully destroy the roost (if present). This would include installation of compensatory roosting provision for bats, for example boxes on buildings and/or trees.
- 1.5. We advocate installation of integrated bird and bat boxes into the walls of the new dwelling, in line with NPPF planning policy, which encourages integrated bat boxes, and achieving net biodiversity gains in new developments.
- 1.6. Implementing all of the above recommendations will ensure that there are no significant impacts upon protected species and that the proposals will be in conformity with relevant legislation and policy.

2 INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Introduction

- 2.1. In September 2019, ACD Environmental Ltd were commissioned by Mr Stuart Keeble to carry out a PEA of a parcel of land at 9 Wilwyne Close, Caversham, Reading, RG4 5EP (OS Grid Reference SU 72258 75484).
- 2.2. The Application Site is located in a cul-de-sac, in Caversham, a suburb of Reading. The Application Site comprises part of the garden of 9 Wilwyne Close.



Image 1: Application Site location and approximate boundary shown in red

Context

- 2.3. Plans are being drawn up to re-develop the Application Site for a new residential unit and associated access driveway link onto Wilwyne Close single detached dwelling (**Image 2**).

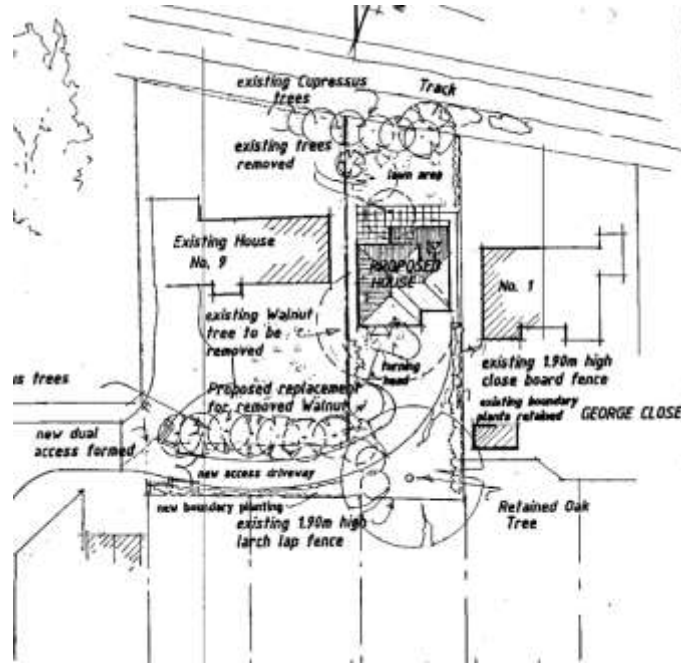


Image 2: The layout of the proposed development

Purpose

2.4. The purpose of this assessment is to:

- Ascertain the general ecological value of the Application Site by:
 - Identifying and assessing the main habitats and plant communities;
 - Assessing the potential for protected species to use the Application Site;
 - Feeding into refinements of the masterplan; and
- To assess any ecological likely impacts of the proposed scheme and recommend appropriate mitigation and enhancements.

3 METHODOLOGY

Experience

- 3.1. The Extended Phase 1 survey was carried out by Daniel Wood (MCIEEM) of ACD Environmental Ltd. Daniel is the Director of Ecology and oversees all work carried out by the ACD Environmental Ltd ecology team. Daniel has 13 years' experience working for commercial consultancies and specialises in European Protected Species (EPS) legislation and mitigation. Daniel holds Natural England Class Licences for barn owls, bats, great crested newts and hazel dormice and is registered consultant on the Badger Class Licence. Daniel has extensive development project experience, on sites of varying sizes from individual dwellings to strategic land allocations involving a wide range of issues. He has experience of projects from pre-acquisition, planning applications, PEA, EcIA, Environmental Statements (ES) for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA).

Background Data Search

- 3.2. The data search involves researching existing ecological knowledge of a site, such as biological records, and any relevant ecological information from the surrounding area.
- 3.3. The data search has been carried out for a 5km radius around the Application Site for statutory designated nature conservation sites and a 2km radius around the Application Site for non-statutory protected sites and protected species records.
- 3.4. The following data sources/organisations and, where relevant, the information provided has been incorporated with acknowledgement within this report:
- The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) website¹ (5km statutory designated nature conservation sites); and
 - Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), non-statutory protected sites and protected species within a 1km radius.

Habitat Survey

- 3.5. The Application Site was surveyed on Wednesday 18th September 2019 using the Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology². This 'Extended' Phase 1 Habitat Survey technique provides an inventory of the basic habitat types present and allows identification of areas of greater

¹ Available at: <http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

² JNCC, (2010), *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit*. JNCC, Peterborough.

potential which require further survey. Any such areas identified can then be examined in more detail. The vegetation present was clearly visible and allowed an accurate assessment to be made.

Fauna

3.6. Incidental records of fauna were made during the survey and the habitats identified were evaluated for their potential to support legally protected species and other species of conservation concern, including species listed on UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (which supersedes UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority species), and mammals assessed as being of conservation concern by 'Britain's Mammals 2018: The Mammal Society's Guide to their Population and Conservation Status'³.

3.7. In addition to the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey, the following species surveys were carried out:

- Badger *Meles meles* –field signs survey;
- Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) for bats of trees within the Application Site

Badger

3.8. Where possible, the Application Site was systematically surveyed for evidence of badgers, in the form of:

- Setts - comprising either single isolated holes or a series of holes, which may be link to each other underground;
- Faeces - badgers deposit faeces in characteristic excavated pits, concentrations of which (latrine sites) are typically found at home range boundaries, field boundaries and around setts;
- Paths - worn paths used by badger, often linked to setts or foraging grounds;
- Scratching posts - typically at the base of tree trunks;
- Snuffle holes - scrapes where badgers have searched for food;
- Day nests - bundles of grass and other vegetation where badgers may sleep above

³ The Mammal Society (2018). *Britain's Mammals 2018: The Mammal Society's Guide to their Population and Conservation Status*. The Mammal Society, London.

ground); and

- Hairs - usually found outside setts or caught under fencing.

Bats

Preliminary Roost Assessment - trees

3.9. A Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) was carried out of trees within the Application Site⁴, the purpose of which is to search for bats/evidence of bats and assess the likelihood of bats being present and the need for further survey and/or mitigation.

3.10. Potential Roost Features (PRFs) and sub-categories of PRFs from the Bat Tree Habitat Key⁵ are as follows:

- Disease and decay PRFs:
 - Woodpecker and squirrel holes;
 - Knot holes;
 - Pruning-cuts;
 - Tear outs;
 - Compression forks;
 - Wounds;
 - Cankers; and
 - Butt rots.
- Association PRFs:
 - Fluting; and
 - Ivy.
- Damage PRFs:

⁴ Collins J. (ed.) (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn)*. The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

⁵ Bat Tree Habitat Key 2018. *Bat Roosts in Trees – A Guide to Identification and Assessment for Tree-care and Ecology professionals*. Exeter: Pelagic Publishing. Online resource available at <http://battreehabitatkey.co.uk/>

- Hazard beams;
- Frost cracks;
- Subsidence/shearing and helical splits;
- Lightning strikes;
- Desiccation fissures;
- Transverse snaps;
- Welds; and
- Lifting bark.

Tree climbing survey for bats

3.11. The tree climbing survey was carried out on 23rd April 2020 by Brian Hicks and Simon Newman. Brian is an Ecologist for ACD Environmental Ltd and holds a level 2 bat licence (2015-14880-CLS-CLS). He is also a qualified tree climber. Simon Newman is a qualified tree climber and arboriculturist.

Birds

3.12. Evidence of nesting birds recorded during the PRA and any incidental bird observations/birds heard were noted.

Potential Limitations

3.13. No limitations were identified during the survey.

Habitats and Species Evaluation and Impact Assessment

3.14. The habitats and species evaluations are made with reference to the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEMs) guidelines for Ecological Report Writing and Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal⁶. The aim of a PEA is to advise on ecological constraints and opportunities, likely mitigation and requirements for further surveys.

⁶ Available at: <https://www.cieem.net/technical-guidance-series-tgs->

4 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Designated Sites

- 4.1. Statutory designated sites are the most significant ecological receptors and include Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and RAMSAR sites, which are all of **International Value**, and Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs), which are of **National Value**.
- 4.2. Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are notified under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended) by local authorities and are of **Local Value**. They are intended for public appreciation and enjoyment of wildlife. The LNR designation does not afford special protection; however, LNRs are protected under legislation and planning policy.
- 4.3. There are no SPAs, SACs, or SSSIs within 5km of the Application Site. There are five LNRs within 5km of the Application Site, of which the closest is 1.4km to the North.

Table 1: Statutory designated sites within 5km of the Application Site.

Name of statutory designated sites	Approximate distance from Application Site	Reason for designation
Clayfield Copse LNR	1.4km south-west	Ancient woodland with service trees and a wild pear tree, bluebells, common orchids and wood anenomes.
Ali's Pond LNR	3.4km East	Supports 18 species of dragonfly, >40 species of aquatic/wetland plants, great crested newt, harvest mouse, stag beetle, song thrush, pipistrelle bat and ragged robin.
Highwood LNR	3.7km South-East	Mixed lowland woodland, heathland and wetland supporting kingfisher, goosander, pochard, shoveler, cormorant, heron, grey wagtail, waxwing,

		treecreeper and greater spotted woodpecker.
McIlroy Park LNR	4.5km West	Grassland, heathland and semi-ancient woodland.
Lousehill Copse	4.5km West	Semi-ancient woodland surrounded by housing.

4.4. There is one Local Wildlife Site (LWS) within 2km of the Application Site, as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Non-statutory designated sites within 2km of the Application Site.

Names of SNCI	Approximate Distance from the Application Site	Nature Conservation Interest
Rotherfield Way Copse LWS	0.6km North-West	Small broad-leaved woodland situated in a dry valley between roads and houses in Emmer Green, Reading.

Protected Species Records

4.5. The relevant protected species records are incorporated into the Fauna section, below, with due acknowledgement.

Survey Results

Habitats

4.6. The Application Site supports the following habitats:

- Bare/disturbed ground (J4)
- Amenity grassland (J1.2)
- Introduced shrubs (J1.4)
- Scattered trees (A3)

4.7.

Bare/disturbed ground

- 4.8. Bare ground is present underneath the group of Lawson Cypress i.e. location of the proposed access road from Wilwyne Close. Bare ground is also present in the garden, at the side of the existing property (Photographs 1 and 2). The habitat is of **negligible ecological value**.



Photograph 1: Bare/disturbed ground adjacent to where access road would join Wilwyne Close



Photograph 2: Bare ground at eastern end of garden adjacent to existing house

Amenity grassland

- 4.9. The garden comprises amenity grassland which is regularly mowed. The grassland is of **negligible ecological value**.



Photograph 3: Amenity grassland looking south towards Application Area

Introduced shrubs

- 4.10. The garden contains a small number of shrub beds, containing native and non-native species including cotoneaster, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, *Buddleia davidii*, crocosmia, and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. A Leylandii hedge is present on the southern Application Site boundary. The shrubs are of **negligible ecological value**.

Scattered trees

- 4.11. The Application Site contains a group of mature Lawson Cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, a large mature walnut *Juglans regia*, and a large English oak *Quercus rober*.
- 4.12. The Lawson Cypress trees are of negligible ecological value. The leaves of walnut are the foodplant for caterpillars of a number of micro moths, and the nuts are eaten by mammals, including mice and squirrels. They can host many insect species, supplying birds with an important food source. Flower and leaf buds of English oak are the food plants of the caterpillars of purple hairstreak butterflies. The soft leaves break down in autumn and form a rich leaf mould beneath the tree, supporting invertebrates such as the stag beetle, and fungi, like the oakbug milkcap *Lactarius quietus*. The walnut and English oak are of value at the **Site Level**. However, it is acknowledged that the walnut is structurally compromised due to a twin

stem and has a limited lifespan. For this reason, replacement of the tree has been recommended by the Arboricultural consultant.

Fauna

Amphibians

- 4.13. The data search from TVERC did not return any records for great crested newt (GCN) *Triturus cristatus*. The Application Site does not contain any ponds. A search on MAGIC MAPS⁷ did not reveal any ponds within a 500m radius. The Application Site is located within a suburb with little connectivity to semi-natural habitats. Based on these factors, it is considered highly unlikely that GCN would exploit the Application Site and GCN are not discussed further in this report.

Badger

- 4.14. The background data search from TVERC returned 6 records of badger *Meles meles* between 2010 and 2016 within 2km. The actual location of the records was not specified. No evidence of badger was recorded on the Extended Phase 1 Survey. It is possible that badgers occasionally visit the Application Site, but the amount of foraging habitat (limited to a small amount of grassland) is inconsequential. On this basis, and given the urban location of the Application Site, the presence of badgers is considered unlikely. Other than precautionary methods of working to prevent risk of harm during construction, badgers are not considered further in this report.

Bats

- 4.15. TVERC returned records of Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentonii*, noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, Leisler's *Nyctalus leisleri*, Nathusius' pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii*, common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, and brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auratus*. The details did not specify whether the records were bat calls or roosts. It is considered likely that the Application Site is exploited by small numbers of the more common species, including common pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats, which exploit garden habitats. Leisler's bats forage in edge and open habitats including woodland, scrub, pasture and near waterbodies. Noctule bats forage in open habitats and above tree canopies between 20 and 70m above the ground. Daubenton's, Nathusius' pipistrelle, and soprano pipistrelle bats to a lesser degree, have an affinity to aquatic habitats such as lakes, reservoirs, rivers and canals. It is considered unlikely that any of these species exploit the Application Site.

⁷ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

- 4.16. The walnut tree in the Application Site (proposed for removal) contains a woodpecker/squirrel hole at 7m height, facing South-West. The English oak (which will be retained) has a wound on a major limb at 10m, facing North-East. Both of these features were assessed as having **high bat roosting potential**.



Photograph 4: Walnut with woodpecker/squirrel hole



Photograph 5: Wound on English oak

- 4.17. On 23rd April 2020, the walnut and the oak were subjected to an aerial tree climbing inspection by a licenced bat surveyor.
- 4.18. The walnut tree is located in the centre of the garden to the south of the house. The tree has three main stems which extend to the south west, north east and north west. The south west and north west stems are linked by Cobra bracing.
- 4.19. The north east stem has several holes which were found to be shallow and had no bat roosting potential. One hole was located at approximately 8 metres in height on the underside of a branch extending to the north east. This hole was spire-shaped and approximately 15cm deep extending into the branch. The hole was approximately 5cm in diameter, with callus roll surrounding. The hole was wet with resident slugs. There was no evidence of bat activity, but the cavity had potential to support bats.



Photograph 6: Cavity with bat roosting potential

4.20. The north west stem had several small holes, none of which extend into the tree.

4.21. The south west stem had a large hole, with callus roll, at approximately 5 metres height. The hole is approximately 6cm in diameter and is a chamber extending into the tree approximately 10cm. The hole was damp with woodlice and slugs present. The chamber was not well sheltered, being only slightly larger internally than the outside diameter. No evidence of bat activity was recorded. The potential for roosting bats was negligible.



Photograph 7: Shallow cavity with callous roll

4.22. The oak tree had a large branch scar on the main stem at approximately 8 metres facing east. The scar had callous around the edges, with the top appearing from the ground to extend into the tree. Close inspection of the scar confirmed that there was no hollow into the stem and the bat roosting potential was negligible.

Birds

4.23. The data search from TVERC returned a number of bird records within 1km of the Application Site. Those that could potentially exploit the Application Site include the following:

- Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
- House sparrow *Passer domesticus*
- Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

4.24. The remainder of the records returned by TVERC are of species of birds that exploit habitats that are not present in the Application Site.

4.25. The Application Site is considered to be of **Site Level value for birds**.

Conclusion

4.26. The Extended Phase One Habitat Survey has identified that the Application Site contains habitats that are predominantly of negligible value, although the walnut and English oak trees are mature specimens with some value to wildlife.

4.27. Following an aerial tree climbing inspection, the walnut tree has a spire-shaped cavity on the underside of a north-east branch at approximately 8 metres, which did not contain any evidence of bats, but has potential to support bats.

5 LEGISLATION AND PLANNING POLICY

5.1. This section summarises the legislation and national, regional and local planning policies, as well as other reference documents, relevant to the baseline ecology results.

Legislation

5.2. Specific habitats and species receive legal protection in the UK under various pieces of legislation, including:

- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017;
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006;
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended);
- The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000;
- The Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

5.3. Where relevant, the assessment takes account of the legislative protection afforded to specific habitats and species.

5.4. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 affords protection to European sites, such as SACs, and EPS, which are detailed further within this report with regard to designated sites and specific species respectively.

5.5. The WCA 1981 (as amended) lists invasive plant and animal species under Schedule 9⁸. This means that it is an offence to plant or allow species on this list to be released into the wild. It is also an offence for animals not ordinarily resident or a regular visitor to Great Britain or listed on Schedule 9 to be released into the wild.

5.6. The UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework, which supersedes UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) priority habitats and species, provides the 'broad enabling structure for action across the UK', which in England is interpreted into Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services; however, some authorities do still refer to BAPs. Protecting habitats and species listed on Section 41 (S41) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 is an outcome of this strategy. The lists of priority habitats and species in England required under S41 were published by Natural England in May 2014⁹. These

⁸ Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/schedule/9>

⁹ Available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4958719460769792>

measures are given due acknowledgement where relevant.

European Protected Species

5.7. EPS are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as well as the WCA 1981 (as amended), which are specifically under Regulation 42¹⁰ and Schedule 5¹¹ respectively. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 amended the WCA 1981 and added 'or recklessly' to existing mentions of 'intentionally' as detailed below. These species include great crested newt, all bat species, hazel dormouse and otter. This level of protection for these species (at all stages of their life cycle) makes it an offence to do the following:

- Intentionally or recklessly capture or kill a wild animal of an EPS;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any such animal;
- Intentionally or recklessly to take or destroy the eggs of such an animal;
- Intentionally or recklessly to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal; or
- To keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange, any live or dead wild animal of an EPS, or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal.

Non-European Protected Species

5.8. Widespread amphibians (including smooth newt, palmate newt, common toad and common frog) are all protected under the WCA 1981 (as amended). For these species, only one section of Schedule 5 applies, which is section 9(5), and protects against the sale of any live or dead animal.

5.9. All wild birds¹² and their nests, irrespective of their conservation status, are protected under the WCA 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- Intentionally or recklessly take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst it is in use or being built;
- Intentionally or recklessly take or destroy the egg of any wild bird;

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/regulation/42/made>

¹¹ Available at: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/waca1981_schedule5.pdf

¹² Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/wild-birds-protection-surveys-and-licences>

- Have in one's possession or control any wild bird, dead or alive, or any part of a wild bird, which has been taken in contravention of the Act or the Protection of Birds Act 1954;
- Have in one's possession or control any egg or part of an egg which has been taken in contravention of the Act or the Protection of Birds Act 1954;
- Use traps or similar items to kill, injure or take wild birds; or
- Have in one's possession or control any bird of a species occurring on Schedule 4¹³ of the Act unless registered, and in most cases ringed, in accordance with the Secretary of State's regulations.

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework

5.10. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹⁴ sets out planning policies on protection of biodiversity and geological conservation through the planning system for local authorities in England. The NPPF outlines the role of the decision maker in considering the requirements of wildlife legislation to protect wildlife. A redacted summary is presented below.

5.11. The NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils;
- Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services;
- Maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- Minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks;
- Preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise

¹³ Available at: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/waca1981_schedule4.pdf

¹⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019). *National Planning Policy Framework*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779764/NPPF_Feb_2019_web.pdf

pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve environmental conditions;

- Remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

5.12. Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

5.13. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

- If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated for, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
- Development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- Development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity.

5.14. The Government Circular 06/2005¹⁵ accompanies the NPPF and sets out the application of the law in relation to planning and nature conservation in England.

¹⁵ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005). *Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System*. Available at: <<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/147570.pdf>>

6 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Statutory Designated Sites

- 6.1. There are no SPAs, SACs or SSSIs within 5km of the Application Site.
- 6.2. There are several LNRs within 5km, but none directly adjacent to the Application Site, the closest being 1.4km away. Given that the proposals are for one dwelling and LNRs are designed to be enjoyed by the public, no adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed development.

Non-Statutory Designated Sites

- 6.3. There is only one LWS within 1km of the Application Site, Rotherfield Way Copse, which is circa 0.6km away. It is not anticipated that the proposed development would generate any adverse effects on the LWS.

Habitats and Fauna

- 6.4. The walnut, which is proposed for removal, has a compromised twin stem¹⁶. Cobra bracing has been installed in the upper crown. It is reasoned that the visual inspection of the fork and associated dysfunction will ultimately necessitate the removal of this tree on Health and Safety grounds. It is proposed to utilise the planning application as a means to secure a replacement tree. This is welcomed, given that the tree has some inherent ecological value.
- 6.5. An aerial inspection was carried out by a qualified tree climber with a Natural England bat licence. Following the aerial tree climbing inspection, the walnut tree was found to have a spire-shaped cavity on the underside of a north-east branch at approximately 8 metres. The cavity did not contain any evidence of bats, but has potential to support bats.
- 6.6. Given this, we recommend that a pre-felling inspection of the cavity is carried out, to ensure that no bats are present. This would be carried out on the same day as the felling. If evidence of bats was found, further surveys may be required and/or a licence from Natural England to lawfully destroy the roost. This would include installation of compensatory roosting provision for bats, for example boxes on buildings and/or trees.

¹⁶ ACD Environmental (2019). *Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement*. 9 Wilwyne Close, Caversham, Reading, RG4 5EP.

Other Fauna

- 6.7. Care must be taken during clearance/groundworks to ensure wildlife is not harmed and in the event any protected species are found when the ecologist is not in attendance, works must stop, they must not be handled and ACD Environmental Ltd contacted in the first instance.
- 6.8. Any excavations should be covered when works are not taking place to ensure that they do not fill with water and prevent the potential for wildlife to become trapped (especially badger) and avoid encouraging amphibians during the course of the works.
- 6.9. Given the protection afforded to all nesting birds, any works impacting upon trees should ideally be undertaken during September to February (inclusive) outside of the main bird breeding season. However, if works are proposed during the bird nesting season, a bird nesting check should be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist. If a birds' nest is found, should stop in the area and an appropriate buffer zone (as determined by the ecologist, usually approximately 5m) must be established around the nest and the nest left until the young have fledged. The buffer must remain intact until it has been confirmed that the young have fledged and the nest is no longer in use.

Enhancements

- 6.10. The NPPF encourages development to provide net gains in biodiversity where possible.
- 6.11. It is recommended that the following enhancements are provided:
- Two integrated bat roosting boxes, built into south/west-facing walls of the new dwelling
 - Two integrated bird nesting boxes, built into north/east-facing walls of the new dwelling – targeting particular species e.g. house sparrow and swift *Apus apus*
 - Plant a native species hedgerow in the garden to encourage fruit-bearing species for birds.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1. The Application Site is of negligible ecological value, other than two mature native trees – a walnut and an English oak. The walnut is proposed for removal. Although it is structurally compromised, it contains a potential bat roosting feature and should be aerially inspected prior to felling to confirm whether or not the feature is exploited by bats (and/or birds).
- 7.2. Implementing all of the recommendations in the report will ensure that there are no significant impacts upon protected species and that the proposals will be in conformity with relevant legislation and policy.



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